

*Afflictions, the LOT of God's  
Children.*

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BEING A  
S E R M O N

Preach'd at the  
Parish-Church of St. James's  
*Clerkenwell.*

OCTOBER the 31<sup>st</sup> 1708.

UPON THE  
D E A T H

OF HER

MAJESTY's Royal Consort,  
Prince George of Denmark.

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By *WILLIAM NICHOLLS*, D. D.

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## H E B. xii. Ver. 7, 8.

*If you endure Chastening, God dealeth with you as with Sons; for what Son is he whom the Father Chasteneth not? But if ye be without Chastisement whereof all are Partakers, then are ye Bastards and not Sons.*

**T**H E S E Words are an Argument drawn from the Goodness of God, the most charming and amiable of all his Attributes; persuading thereby all the good and faithful Servants of God, to a patient bearing those Afflictions which his All-wise Dispensations shall lay them under; assuring them, That these often very heavy Strokes do not proceed from the Frowns of an Enraged Adversary, but from the Gracious Indulgence of a Loving Father, who designs nothing but our Good by them, and by a seasonable Correction, is working our Advantage and Improvement. They likewise assure us, that Afflictions are so far from being Signs of God's Anger towards us, and that by some Remarkable illness of our Actions we have Forfeited a Claim to his Favour, (as sometimes the Malice of others, or our own Melancholy Apprehensions may be apt to suggest,) that on the other side, they are a clear Evidence of his especial good Will towards us, and do withal ascertain us, that, without some Degree or other of them, Men can hardly be thought to be the Children of God, or to remain in his Favour.

In discoursing upon these Words, I shall endeavour to make good the following Particulars.

I. That the very many or very great Afflictions, which good Persons do sometimes undergo, are not Signs of their being out of God's Favour, or that they have been guilty of any Remarkable Transgression of their Duty, more than other Persons who suffer less.

II. That they are rather Signs of God's Goodness and Favour to them.

III. What proper and effectual Motives our Holy Religion does afford such good Persons, for a patient bearing their Afflictions.

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I. That the very many or very great Afflictions which good Persons do sometimes undergo, are not generally signs of their being out of God's Favour, or that they have been guilty of any remarkable Transgression of their Duty, more than other Persons who suffer less. But there is a spiteful Humour too common among Mankind, which makes a quite different Observation. We find that the Inhabitants of *Malta* did the same upon *St. Paul*; and 'twere to be wished that this kind of Inhumanity were peculiar to those Barbarians. These Persons took notice of a long train of Misfortunes, following upon one another, to break upon this seemingly unhappy Person. He had been lately Imprisoned and Arraigned for a Capital Crime, and sent in Irons from *Judea* to *Rome*, suffered in his Passage one of the most terrible Storms that has been heard of, and was at last Ship-wreck'd with a narrow escape of his Life, who no sooner came to Shore, but had a Serpent, whose Venom was esteemed present Death, fastened upon his Hand. Upon whom the People of that Island make this Uncharitable Remark; *No doubt this Man is a Murderer, whom, tho' he hath escaped the Sea, yet Vengeance suffereth him not to live,* Acts xxviii



# on the Death of the PRINCE. 5

But 1st, This Reasoning was very wrong, not only as the Event of that History shew'd, but upon the ground which it goes upon, as supposing that God equally adjusts his Rewards and Punishments in this World, and makes all Persons Happy or Unhappy here, according to their Demerits. Indeed, God will do so sometime or other, but he will take his own Time for it, and not just when we call for, or expect it; this we may expect from him as a Just God, but he has a whole Eternity before him to do it in, and therefore, as a Wise-God, he will find the properest Opportunity for it. There will a time come in which all the long Run of Prosperity, and the *Halcyon* Days which wicked Men enjoy, shall have a Period put to them, and be turned into Wailing and Wo; and there will a Time as certainly come, when afflicted Saints shall for ever Rejoyce. But I find that this ill-natur'd Objection against afflicted Piety is usually made by the worst Men; Persons who know well enough their own ill Qualities, which they see God does not punish them for, and therefore they conclude, that those who lie under any of God's Judgments must be, secretly at least, more bad than themselves. This was Objected by the wicked *Jews*, not only against our Saviour himself at his Crucifixion, but against the *Galileans*, whose Blood *Pilate* mingled with their Sacrifices, and against the Eighteen upon whom the Tower *Siloam* fell, *Luke* xiii. But our Saviour's Reply carries a full Confutation of this, *I tell you nay*, i. e. These Persons were not greater Sinners than other Men, nay, not so much perhaps, as you the Objectors: *But except ye Repent ye shall all likewise Perish*: Leave off your Remarks on other Mens Misfortunes, look after your own Sins, and take care to avert God's Judgments upon you for them; for if you do not, God will shower down his Vengeance upon you one time or nother, in a more signal manner, than in the sad forementioned Instances.

2. This usual Reflection upon the great Afflictions of good Persons is ill grounded, because we are ignorant of

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the Desigas of God's Providence, even in this World. God is a Wise and Sagacious Governour, who has Millions of Noble Views and Designs, which are beyond the Ken of our short-sighted Understanding; and what looks oftentimes to us with a gloomy Aspect, and seems to bode nothing but dismal Horrour and the Frowns of the Almighty, clears up afterwards into Brightness and Sun-shine. Those who had hard Thoughts of *Joseph* in his Bondage and Imprisonment, when they saw him in his future Honour, were satisfied that God laid upon him his Afflictions, only to pave a Way to his great Advancement. And if we were let in, to have a distinct View of the several Wheels and Movements of God's Providence, which are working one within another to bring about his wise Designs; we might then better see, why many Good Men have a larger share of Sufferings than their own Sins do call for; then we might see clearer, where he visits for Sins on our own Score, and where for the Sins of our Fore-fathers; how many severe Afflictions are sent for Discipline, and further Improvement of Talents of Grace, and how many other to furnish out a Noble Example of Patience and Resignation to the Divine Will, for others to Copy by. I now proceed to shew,

II. That those very many or great Afflictions, which good Persons do sometimes undergo, are rather Signs of God's Goodness and Favour to them.

Ist. Because they thereby have a well grounded Assurance that God does acknowledge them for his Children. This Argument is not only insisted on by the Apostle in the Text, but by *Solomon* long before him. *My Son despise not the Chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of his Correction. For whom the Lord loveth he Correcteth, even as the Father the Son in whom he delighteth.* Prov. iii. 11, 12. But to us Christians, this is one of the Fundamental Doctrines of our Religion: Afflictions are the very Badge of our Profession:

## on the Death of the PRINCE. 7

on: We are Baptized into the Doctrine of the Cross, and in that Holy Sacrament engage our selves to be followers of an Afflicted Saviour, who was a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. He, the *Captain of our Salvation*, was *perfected by Sufferings*; then we surely who have listed our selves under his Banner, must look for something of his Service: We must not think to run thro' our whole Christian warfare in a course of Laziness, but we must expect harrassings and fatigues, watching and fighting, Poverty and Want, or whatever hard Service our great Master thinks fit to enjoin us; in short, we must expect to live the lives of Soldiers, to partake of the Hardships of a Camp, and not always enjoy the soft Pleasures of a Court. And indeed, this is the first Condition which our Saviour offered to his Followers. *If any Man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his Cross and follow me.* If any Man will be my Disciple he must *partake of my Cross*; if he will Fight under my Banner, he must *drink of my Cup*; but if he be so Tender and Delicate, that he cannot down with Afflictions, he is no fit Follower of me, the persecuted Jesus; my Religion does not Intitle Men to Beds of Down and Ivory, when I my self have not whereon to lay my Head. And moreover 'tis observable, that God Almighty had his best and dearest Servants, when there reigned the severest Calamities among the Christians. The time of the Primitive Goodness, and Purity, was the most remarkable one for the *suffering of the Saints*; when their Zeal was most fervent, Persecutions were the hottest; nor did their Piety slacken, till Temporal Felicity had loosened the Nerves of the Primitive Institution, had dissolved Men first into Ease, and afterwards ensnared them into Vice. And we cannot but observe, this to be still the Method of God's Providence, to dispense to his best Servants a large share of Afflictions; thereby to make them sensible of their Duty, to School and Discipline them into Obedience, least by a long stream of Felicity they forget the Task they have



to do, or grow stubborn and refractory, or come at last, it may be, to dispute their Master's Commands. And by this he shews the kind and Fatherly Love he bears to us, by stopping us in our full Career of Sinfulness, before we are too far gone; by laying something that is Troublesome in our way to hinder our progress, to gall and fret us, and to fright us back again into his Arms; and all this out of his Paternal care towards us. For as for the stubborn and refractory Sinner, who disclaims all Alliance with God, he lets him (as the Psalmists speaks) *fall from one Wickedness to another*; he permits him to run on as he pleases without controul, thereby to fill up the measure of his Wickedness.

Now, upon these Considerations, several Pious Christians in former times, having observed their Life to pass over without any considerable Calamities, have even put up their Prayers to God for them, that he would be pleased to visit them with some Afflictions, lest their uninterrupted Prosperity should preclude them from God's Favour, and be a Bar to their Legitimacy in Grace: Now, tho' I will not affirm that Afflictions are things to be prayed for, yet these are such usual Attendants on Piety, that, when one finds ones self carried on in a constant series of Prosperity, without any mixture of Crosses or Troubles, it will be apt to make a Man mistrust his Estate, and to raise some mis-givings within him, that he is not among the Number of God's Children, upon whom the Gospel does entail so many Calamities and Sufferings. Upon the whole thereof, it is a very great content to good Persons under their Afflictions, that, tho' these be not an infallible Mark of a Child of God, yet they are such, as very few of God's Children pass thro' this World without.

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2dly. Good Persons Afflictions are a sign of God's Goodness and Favour to them, because they render them more truly Thankful for God's former Blessings. Whilst all things run on in a full current of  
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## on the Death of the PRINCE. 9

Happiness, and Blessings unwilht for flow in upon us, our Enjoyments come in so thick, that we have not time to consider the Source, and Original of them. But when God pleases to withdraw some of those Blessings, which we have long too Unthankfully enjoyed, we then begin to find the want of them, and how much we were obliged to our Gracious God, for his long continuance of them to us. Now such an after-gratitude is of all others the most Noble and Religious; because it does not proceed from any Principle of Self-love as it generally does, when we are under the enjoyment of a Blessing; but to be Thankful for a Favour which we can no longer enjoy, the pleasure of which is vanished and gone, can proceed from nothing else but a hearty Love and Respect to the Giver. Holy *David* is an eminent Example of this, who frequently in the midst of his Complaints, falls a magnifying God's former Goodness to him. *Why art thou so full of heaviness, O my Soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me? O put thy Trust in God, for I will yet give him Thanks, who is the help of my Countenance and my God.* Psal. 68. 19, 20.

3dly. Good Persons Afflictions are a Sign of God's Favour to them, because they wean them from the World and bring them nigher to God. We should be apt to bid our *Souls take their Ease*, we should be inclined to think, that it were good for us to be here; we should be for building Tabernacles and making an abiding place of this World, which God designed us only for a place of sojourning; but only that God Almighty now and then kindly awakens us, and shews us in some affecting Instances the Uncertainty of this World, and teaches us to place our Hopes only on him, in whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning. Jam. 1. 17. Unless he sometimes Read us some of these severe Lessons; we, by too long a familiarity with the good things of this World, should grow so enamoured of them

as to forget our Love and Duty to our Heavenly Father.

And indeed we are all apt to Love them so well, that we can bear a great deal of ill usage, before we can find in our Hearts to part with them; but Afflictions take off this unreasonable Fondness, they make this Beloved World of ours seem but an indifferent thing; they raise our Hopes and quicken our Desires of a future Happiness, and make us eagerly to wish to *be with Christ, which is better.*

Afford a  
Trial of  
Patience,  
and Trust.

4ly. Good Persons Afflictions are signs of God's Favour to them, Because they afford them a Tryal of their Patience and Trust. Patience under Afflictions, and a sure trust and reliance upon God, are two of the most excellent Vertues of Christianity; and yet we can never tell how much we are to seek in these, or how well we can acquit our selves therein, unless our Afflictions do give us Demonstration of it. We may perhaps raise fine Notions of these things in the Theory, and make curious Declamations upon them to others; but when we our selves come to the Practice, we may find our selves miserably at a loss; we may, for ought we know, murmur and repine, rage and claimour under our Misfortunes, we may distrust God Almighty's Favour, or tax the Justice of his Providence. And this the Devil knew well enough to be the case of many Men, when he pretended to God it was *Job's*: *Doth Job serve God for Naught?* But put forth, says he, thy Hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will Curse thee to thy Face. *Job* 1. 11. In which Words, the Devil charges *Job*, that his pretence to Piety was but meer collogueing with God; not proceeding from a Hearty Love to God, but only from a Love to the good things of this World. Now, tho' the Event of this History shews, that the Devil's Suggestion in the case of this Eminently Pious Person was false, yet so far that wicked Spirit was in the right, that Affliction tries a Man to the quick, and makes him plainly discover, whether he be only a Mercenary Pretender to Religion, or whether

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er he be, as Job was, an upright Man, fearing God and eschewing Evil. And upon this Consideration is founded that Advice of the Apostle. *My Brethren count it joy, when ye fall into diverse Temptations (i. e.) Afflictions, knowing this that the Trial of your Faith worketh Patience* Jam. 1. 2. So that it is a matter of joy to us you see, when we suffer Adversity: For then, if we bear it patiently, and with a sure Reliance upon God, we are certain that we are Masters of those Christian Vertues, which we might doubt of before, when we could not have an opportunity of experiencing them. The like may be said of all other Virtues, that Afflictions do assure us that they are true and unfeigned. For, tho' without these a good Man may have a reasonable Assurance of his own Integrity, by a diligent care to discharge his duty in all Respects, yet it cannot be denyed, but that he must have a more Comfortable Assurance of it, when he goes on to depend upon God, under the hard pressures of Affliction. Upon this Trial we cannot doubt, but that it was for God's sake that we abstained from Sin, and not on Account of any Secular Advantage. Or, tho' we might not have any reasonable Distrust of our Integrity before, yet under our Afflictions we undergo God's own touch, and we have in a manner his Seal for our Integrity. I now come to the last particular, To shew,

III. What proper, and effectual Motives our Holy Religion does afford to good Persons, for a patient bearing of their Afflictions. And of the many which may be urged, I shall confine my self to these following.

1. We ought to take our Afflictions patiently; Because they proceed from Almighty God, who has an absolute Authority over us. Indeed should any of our Equals pretend to lay such a Punishment upon us, we might

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might with Reason enough take it heighnously ; but we have less Reason to do so, when our Chastisements do proceed from a competent Authority. Though we will not suffer all Persons to take this upon them yet we are wont patiently to submit to our Parents, our Masters, and our Magistrates. Then certainly we ought not to Fly in the Face of Almighty God, who has the most uncontrollable Authority over us when we are under his Chastisement ; for he is not only our Lord and Governour, and Father and Judge but he is the sole Proprietor of all that we stand possessed of, whatever he takes from us is but calling home what he lent us, and to repine thereat, is to shew a base Ingratitude for so long a continued Favour. This is only to provoke his Almighty Power to use us worse, to deprive us of other Blessings which he suffers us still to enjoy. Holy Job made a wiser Reflection upon this Consideration of God's Sovereignty, and upon our Universal Dependence upon him. *Naked came I out of my Mothers Womb, and naked shall I return thither : The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and Blessed be the Name of the Lord.* Job I. 21.

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2. Another Reason for us to bear our Afflictions patiently is ; because God designs them for our good. Whatever is harsh and unpleasing in it self, if it come with a kind Intention and be designed for our Benefit, we are wont to receive without Resentment. Physick, tho' never so artfully wrought up, is always nauseous, and yet we are not Angry with the Person that prescribes it, because the Medicine is unpalatable, since we know that this is designed for our Recovery. Afflictions are God's Physick, by which he designs to make us better ; and therefore, we ought to take up a Patience and Resolution to go thro' whatever course of this kind, he in his Wisdom, shall think fit to put us under.

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but for a  
while.

3. Another Reason for us patiently to bear our Afflictions is ; because God Almighty is never wanting to afford us sufficient strength to go through them with patience, if we earnestly beg it of him. He

has



is promised that he will not suffer us to be Tempted,  
e. Afflicted above what we are able, but will with the  
temptation make a way to Escape, that we may be able to  
bear it. 1 Cor. x. 13. Then he is pleased to inspire  
us with such an ardent degree of Spiritual Love,  
to print such deep Impressions on our Minds, of the  
Divine Goodness, of the Wisdom of God's provi-  
dential Dispensations, of our Blessed Saviour's Love  
to Mankind, and his Suffering for our sakes; which  
are such strong Cordials to raise Mens Spirits under  
their Afflictions, as seldom or never fail to have a  
good effect.

4. Another Reason for us patiently to bear our  
Afflictions is; Because they cannot be of very long  
Continuance. We ought to compare the continuance  
of every thing which relates to our selves, not with  
Days and Years, but with Eternity, which is the true  
extent of our Being. What should I Trouble my self  
about a few uncomfortable Years, to be spent in this  
World, when I am shortly to enter upon a State,  
where I must live out so many Millions of Ages?  
It cannot be long before Death comes, and puts a  
Period to all these Sorrows, and conveys me to a  
state, where all Tears shall be wiped from mine Eyes.  
The Grave is a safe Retreat from all Trouble and  
Disquiet, no Vexations of this World will pursue  
us into that gloomy Retirement. *There the Wicked cease  
from Troubling: There the weary be at rest. There  
the Prisoners rest together, they hear not the Voice of  
the Oppressor. The small and the great are there,  
and the Servant is free from his Master.* Job. iii. 17,  
18, 19.

5. The Last and most forcible Reason, which I shall  
urge for good Mens patiently bearing their Afflictions  
is; Because God shall plentifully Reward them for it,  
in a Future State. By this noble Argument the A-  
postle buoys up himself, and the first Christians, under  
the Troubles and Persecutions they met with. *For  
our light Affliction which is but for a Moment, worketh a  
far more exceeding and eternal weight of Glory.* 2 Cor.

iv. 17. And indeed what need any one value a little worldly Trouble, with Heaven in his View? The hopes of arriving at that happy Shore, will make us despise all the Storms and Boisterous Billows of this World; which can only Foam and Beat about us, but can do us no harm. And when we shall enter upon a State of inexpressible Happiness, which is vast in it self, and endless in its duration, which no Trouble shall allay, and no Death ever put a Period to: Oh with what Pleasure shall we look down upon the little Misfortunes in this Life, which befell us in our Passage thither, and, by affording an opportunity of exercising our Vertue, have been the lucky occasion of increasing our Joys! Oh how joyful will it be to meet those dear Friends and Relations there, whom we have so sadly Mourned for and Bewailed, because they left us in this World; and yet we should think it pitty that they should be retarded one Minute, from entering into that Happy Place.

And now having gone through the Particulars I laid down, in shewing,

1<sup>st</sup>, That Afflictions do not argue Persons to be out of God's Favour,

But 2<sup>ly</sup>, That when they happen to good Men are rather Marks of it;

And having shewn in the Last place the proper Motives for the patient bearing of Afflictions,

I crave leave of you to let your Attention go along with me, in some few Reflections on the great Affliction, which has lately happened to our Gracious QUEEN, in the Loss of Her dear Consort. A Loss so much the more affecting, as the Person she Mourns for was so extraordinarily deserving. And 'tis but just, that every one who retains an Esteem for Her, should shed a Tear over his Affes. And tho' I am not wont to be over Officious in paying these Respects in publick, yet I cannot forbear to lay before you some short Remarks, concerning a Person who has deserved so well of this Nation.

His

on the Death of the PRINCE. 15

His Memory ought to be for ever Pretious to us, for the Zeal which he shewed for our Common Religion, at a time when it lay at so extreme an Hazard; and when he might have purchased his own Ease and Advantage, by a bare Connivance at those unwarrantable Designs, which were then carrying on.

And to his lasting Honour be it mentioned, that hardly any Memoirs in History do give us an Account of any great Person, that for more than Twenty Years together lived in a Court in so prime a degree of Honour, had not only no Enemy, but had every one his Friend. But what is more than this, during all that time has given such an Instance of Self-denial, as is not to be parallel'd in any Age, for one that was so nearly Allied to the Throne (considering how Natural it is to make use of Power and Interest to countenance Parties, and advance Favours) never to Embark in any one Action, I need not say contrary to the publick Good, but not so much as in any one that was Unpopular; so very rarely Recommended any one to the Throne for Preference, and those always such, who were Recommended first by their own Merits.

I observe that Holy *David* in his Elegy on a Royal Person, the stains of whose Life made him not to be Compared with our most vertuous Prince, said, *We Daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in Scarlet, &c.* And was the Remembrance of this such an occasion of Tears? Weep rather, Oh ye Daughters of this Nation, Weep over a Prince that has set such an Illustrious Example of Conjugal Affection, as hath made him (considering the rareness of this Virtue among Men of his High Condition) to be the Phœnix of the Age! Weep over a Prince, who by the Return of his most sincere Love to his Royal Consort, did shame away all Polluted Embraces into Holes and Corners; which, before his Chast Example shone so bright at Court, had the Forehead to appear open, and in the Light. And I hope that now he is gone to God, that his Example will  
be



be still a Check upon those Lewd Persons, who have forgot the strict Engagements, which they formerly made with such endearing Accents to their Loving Consorts, and so publickly Ratified before God in his Holy Temple; those that have abandoned, for the sake of filthy Prostitutes, their own Vertuous and Honourable Ladies, who have *left their Father's House and their Mother which gave them suck*, to take shelter in their Bosom; I say, I hope the remembrance of this good Example will make the Consciences of such Men haunt them, and stare them broad in their Faces, till they have repented them of their Wickedness, and returned to their Duty. And I pray God, that we may all imitate the several other Particulars of this good Example, and that God would afford all the Comforts of his Holy Spirit, to support our Gracious QUEEN under so unspeakable a LOSS.

*Which God, &c.*



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